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IMAGINATION AND JUDGMENT.*

THE writings of the moralists are full of passages showing the vanity and the cruelty of imagination; and the antithesis of imagination and judgment is found in ordinary use, to bring out the hazards of a particular type of mind. "Too much imagination and too little judgment"—it applies to the sanguine and optimistic man of business, to the hot-headed soldier, to all the great race of borrowers, all those who are ready to pledge their future, who believe what they wish to be true. Even the whole human race comes under this description, in many sermons on the Vanity of Human Wishes:

"When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat,
Yet fool'd with hope men favor the deceit;
Trust on, and think to-morrow will repay;
To-morrow's falser than the former day;
Lies worse, and while it says we shall be blest
With some new joys, cuts off what we possess.
Strange cozenage! None would live past years again,
Yet all hope pleasure in what yet remain;
And from the dregs of life think to receive
What the first sprightly running could not give.
I'm tired of waiting for this chymic gold,
Which fools us young, and beggars us when old."

Between the idle imagination that will not take proper account of circumstances, will not see things as they are, and the heated imagination that over-estimates all values (with or without the delusive help of poetry) there are plenty of opportunities for the moralists, and there is little need for quotation. But one exceptional passage may be quoted, because it illustrates a remarkable diversion from the common track of the moralist; a passage in which Wordsworth eloquently and fervently recites a number of cases of illusion and exaggeration, not in order to display the weaknesses of human nature, but to derive hope and encouragement from the very thought of its passions:

"The history of all ages; tumults after tumults; wars, foreign or civil, with short or no breathing spaces, from generation to generation; wars—

*An address read to the London School of Ethics, Sunday, Feb. 18, 1900.

why and wherefore? yet with courage, with perseverance, with self-sacrifice, with enthusiasm—with cruelty driving forward the cruel man from its own terrible nakedness, and attracting the more benign by the accompaniment of some shadow which seems to sanctify it; the senseless weaving and interweaving of factions—vanishing and reviving and piercing each other like the Northern Lights; public commotions and those in the bosom of the individual; the long calenture to which the Lover is subject; the blast, like the blast of the desert, which sweeps perennially through a frightful solitude of his own making in the mind of the Gamester; the slowly quickening but ever quickening descent of appetite down which the Miser is propelled; the agony and cleaving oppression of grief; the ghostlike hauntings of shame; the incubus of revenge; the life-distemper of ambition; these inward existences, and the visible and familiar occurrences of daily life in every town and village; the patient curiosity and contagious acclamations of the multitude in the streets of the city and within the walls of the theatre; a procession, or a rural dance; a hunting, or a horse-race; a flood, or a fire; rejoicing and ringing of bells for an unexpected gift of good fortune, or the coming of a foolish heir to his estate;—these demonstrate incontestibly that the passions of men (I mean the soul of sensibility in the heart of man) in all quarrels, in all contests, in all quests, in all delights, in all employments which are either sought by men or thrust upon them—do immeasurably transcend their objects.*

This flaming sentence might easily be taken as an exposure and indictment of human frailty and folly, and there is certainly no need for any increase in the vehemence of its tone. But the moral which Wordsworth wishes here to enforce is not the old one, and his vehemence is not intended as denunciation.

"The true sorrow of humanity consists in this, not that the mind of man fails; but that the course and demands of action and of life do rarely correspond with the dignity and intensity of human desires: and hence that, which is slow to languish, is too easily turned aside and abused."

Men are ennobled, that is, by their passionate and imaginative courage and perseverance, even when they may be throwing themselves away on vanities. Men are frequently stronger than sound judgment would allow them to be, says Wordsworth, in effect. The object of his political tract was to prove the importance of the Spanish rising, and he supports his case by proving the motive strength of illusion. You might think that the Spaniards would see their true interest in yielding to the French; but no! it is just as likely, from general principles of human nature, that they will make a heroic defence

*Wordsworth, "The Convention of Cintra."

against the invader. Heroism is just as natural as cowardice, passionate strength is just as natural and just as common as timidity. Passion may be either good or evil, and Wordsworth in his torrent of examples takes no pains to choose only those that are favorable. But it is at least as often good as not, and one of the influences that help to make it good is imagination. From passion and imagination other moral results may be expected than those proceeding from sound judgment; on that point all moralists are agreed; but this moralist adds that all the really great good and noble things of humanity come from passion and imagination.

This is not the ordinary teaching. At the same time it is not purely schismatic doctrine; it is characteristic of Wordsworth, indeed, but it is in some measure also characteristic of the age in which he was writing. We are accustomed to hear as an historical fact that there was a great revival of imaginative power at the close of the eighteenth century, a revival shown in the works of poets and novelists. There was at the same time a good deal of theorizing, more or less philosophical, about the nature of imagination, a conscious and reflective acknowledgment of the dignity of imagination, and something like a general movement to gain for imagination the respect and even more than the respect which had been usually given to prudence and sound judgment. Wordsworth and Coleridge are the principal expounders of these views, but there were others. Blake, for example: "Imagination is the real and eternal world of which this vegetable universe is but a faint shadow." Going along with this mysterious doctrine in Blake's mind is a hatred of abstractions, a love of what is concrete. The two points of view are held in turn, it will be found, by many of the chief opponents of prosaic rationalism; they are mystics for a time, but when they return from the transcendental region there is no confusion nor cloudiness about their perceptions of things; their imagination makes them see truly. So Blake, having apparently dismissed common realities under the contemptuous label of "this vegetable universe" goes on to show that this lofty demeanor, this transcendental

imagination, goes along with the most severe and scrupulous judgment in regard to common realities :

“He who would do good to another must do it in minute particulars :
General good is the plea of the scoundrel, hypocrite and flatterer—
For Art and Science cannot exist but in minutely organized particulars
And not in generalizing demonstrations of the Rational Power :
The Infinite alone resides in definite and determinate identity.”

Or, one might say, in other words, Science, Art and Morality are all apt to be spoiled by abstractions, and are all alike saved by Imagination, that form of Reason which makes definite pictures in place of abstract propositions.

Blake's countryman Burke is on this side also. Though he does not make the same use of the term, it is on Imagination that Burke relies in his contest with abstract theory. What he hates is the analytic understanding, the sort of acuteness that is satisfied with partial successes, with single and separate arguments, with abstract demonstrations. What he vindicates as the true legitimate form of Reason is a kind of imaginative comprehension, in which realities are not stripped of their individual bodily life. His favorite position is that all political reasoning needs body in it, filling, substance, matter, and that precisely of the sort which cannot be generalized, which needs to be taken as it is, concretely. What the political thinker most requires is imagination. Burke does not say this in so many words, but imagination seems a fitting name for the mode of thinking which he explains in almost every page of his works. It is an ordinary word, at any rate, for the faculty of realizing to oneself in an intuitive way the meaning of what one is talking about, and it is this gift that Burke would recommend to Members of Parliament. They cannot know what a Constitution is unless they know the character, temper, prejudices and aims of individual Englishmen; they must take account of the living circumstances. Political success, in Burke's view, depends on things local, domestic, particular; things that make the familiar content and coloring of life. “We begin our public affections in our families. No cold relation is a zealous citizen. We pass on to our neighborhoods and our habitual provincial connections. These are inns and resting places.

Such divisions of our country as have been formed by habit, and not by the sudden jerk of authority, were so many little images of the great country in which the heart found something which it could fill."

While Burke's thinking is thus more concrete and detailed than that of the abstract politician, it is also wider and more comprehensive. It breaks the illusion of the abstract thinker by calling in the aid of definite individuals, seen clearly in their details, as with the mind of a dramatist working out his story; it also rises above the limitations of abstract thinking to the magnificent wide view of all the kingdoms of the world, the profusion of life in its course from century to century, "the great mysterious corporation of the human race." These are the two modes of his thought, and both are worth illustration.

This is the way in which he tests the sentimental English sympathy with the Jacobins. He finds the adversary trading with the name of France—an abstraction—and he proceeds to substitute individual terms for that generality:

"'France,' says the author, 'will do this;' 'it is in the interest of France.' "The returning honor and generosity of France,' etc., etc. Always merely France; just as if we were in a common political war with an old recognized member of the commonwealth of Christian Europe;—by sleight of hand the Jacobins are clean vanished, and it is France we have got under our cup. Blessings on his soul that first invented sleep, said Don Sancho Panza the wise! All true blessings and ten thousand times more, on him who found out abstraction, personification, and impersonals! In certain cases they are the first of all soporoficks. Terribly alarmed we should be if things were proposed to us in the *concrete*; or if fraternity was held out to us with the individuals who compose this France by their proper names and descriptions; if we were told that it was very proper to enter into the closest bonds of amity and good correspondence with the devout, pacific and tender-hearted Syeyes, with the all-accomplished Rewbel, with the humane guillotinish of Bordeaux, Tallien and Isabeau; with the meek butcher Legendre, and with 'the returned humanity and generosity' (that had been only on a visit abroad) of the virtuous regicide brewer Santerre. . . . But plain truth would here be shocking and absurd; therefore comes in abstraction and personification. 'Make your peace with France.' That word *France* sounds quite as well as any other, and it conveys no idea but that of a very pleasant country and very hospitable inhabitants. Nothing absurd and shocking in amity and good correspondence with France. Permit me to say, that I am not yet well acquainted with this new-coined France, and, without a careful assay, I am not willing to receive it in currency in place of the old Louis d'or."

On the other hand, leaving all minute things, Burke will speak of "that elevation of Reason which places centuries under our eye, and brings things to the true point of comparison; which obscures little names and effaces the colors of little parties; to which nothing can ascend but the spirit and moral quality of human action." And again in a passage which begins with some of Burke's characteristic freedom in the use of common terms and goes on to something like a prose version of Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty," or even like the "large utterance" of one of the older Greek philosophers :

"Society is indeed a contract. Subordinate contracts for objects of mere occasional interest may be dissolved at pleasure—but the state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico, tobacco, or some such other low concern, to be taken up for a little temporary interest and to be dissolved by the fancy of the parties. It is to be looked on with other reverence; because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence, of a temporary and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection.

"As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born. Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primæval contract of eternal Society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures each in their appointed place."

This is generalization, but it is the generalization of the artist judging the total effect, the main features, of the object he has before his mind; it is synoptic, like the eye of the painter when he is finding the composition of a landscape, or like an author working out the right proportions of his story. Though general, it is not abstract; the matter is still definite, though it is regarded from a point of view that lets the subordinate differences fall out of notice.

It is not easy to find a better name than Imagination for these modes of thought; they are imaginative in their hold upon the living particulars of experience, on the one hand, and in their lofty and comprehensive vision on the other. And they exemplify a habit of mind that has some claim to rank among the intellectual virtues, or perhaps more rightly as the highest

form of practical wisdom or prudence. This kind of imagination is not opposed to judgment; it is the ground and source of right judgment, being the habit of mind which is both comprehensive and definite, both long-sighted and minute.

A sort of imagination is required for all right action, and there are few good actions but might be improved by a little more of it. May we take the name imagination to denote the power of realizing what one is speaking and thinking about? It seems a permissible and not uncommon use of the term. There is a significant piece of moralizing in a remark of Gordon's among the horrors of the Chinese rebellion: "I hope to get the Shanghai people to assist, but they do not see these things." "These things" are the various abominations of famine, and one gathers that if the Shanghai people had more of imagination they would be more active in a practical way. It was this kind of imagination that Carlyle was always talking about and encouraging when he was not among the Eternal Verities; or perhaps it would be truer to say that as with Burke and Wordsworth, the Eternities and the Infinities put compulsion on him to look in everything for minute particulars, to see things clearly and bodily, to think himself defrauded, and to express his feelings in strong language, when he found his authors leaving out the accessories in their story. Perhaps he expected too much from History, but there can be little question, I should think, about the value of his advice for a School of Ethics when he insists that people should do their best to realize—to "see," in the common figurative sense—the facts with which they are concerned in theory or in practice.

The great difficulty is that **ignorance** is as requisite for life as knowledge; it is not easy to discern in every case which of the two is the better. One must be content not to know most things, and to know very little about what remains; not to reflect, not to imagine, is often not only the most comfortable, but the most virtuous course—*e. g.*, in the case of one's grievances against other people, and in the case of all things that do not really matter. There is no need to prove the harm that may be done by the imagination when it takes the wrong turning, and magnifies everything painful and disastrous. The

Self-Tormentor is an old favorite in comedy. But on the other hand the right use of imagination is little less than the very bond of human society; and it has hardly been made enough of by the moralists. No man ever gave away to another or made allowance for him without being something of a dramatist; dramatic imagination enters into every question of justice. How can you understand other people's motives unless you act out a fragment or two of a play in which they are characters? The process described in the introduction to "The Ring and the Book" is no invention of the poet's—it is part of the common traffic of life. You find a story presented to you, with certain facts and events recorded; you cannot at once give judgment on the meaning of it all; you want to get at the truth, to make the facts intelligible. There is no way but by adding something out of your imagination. You set the puppets moving in a private theatre of your own; you invent thoughts and speeches for them; you succeed in getting a coherent and intelligible sequence. You add an alloy, like Mr. Browning in his poem, to make the metal workable. The process may be used for an epic or a drama, but the process is known to the whole human race and is not among the privileges of men of letters merely. Most of life is spent in judging one's neighbors, and there can be no judgment good or bad without imagination. The phenomena of my neighbor, his sayings and doings, have to be put together to be interpreted. By the most rudimentary and simple minds they are dramatized, they are made to fit into an imaginary character which seems to explain them. My neighbor is a character in my novel, as fictitious as Mr. Micawber or Captain Costigan. He is a working hypothesis, made by the imagination. He may be also real in his own way, but that makes no difference to my mode of judging him.

One moral theme which the moralists have not quite exhausted is historical judgment—the estimate of characters and situations in history. It may not be of the greatest importance in the conduct of life, but it is not mere diversion. It bears upon practice, and on that judgment of my neighbor which goes on from day to day, and which enters into every bargain and exchange. The graduations between a practical estimate

of my neighbor and a theoretical, historical, estimate of the character of Alexander the Great are not broken by any gap. The same method is used in both cases, though the materials are not the same. The value of historical problems in a School of Ethics is, for one thing, that they bring out the peculiarities of those who judge, and give at times a cruel demonstration of their fallacies. In private cases there is seldom opportunity for thoroughly testing an opinion; but history is more or less common ground, and if you can get a man's results on some historical question you have probably added something to the data of Ethics. It is one of the uses of history to afford materials for the moral philosopher. It sometimes provides refreshment for the scorner, in the paradoxes of historians. The grossest fallacies in this region are due no doubt to pure ignorance, as when Luther is revered by devout persons who would be pained by his tolerance of polygamy; or as when one comes upon ardent admirers of Cromwell who believe in the essential beastliness of war. But there are fallacies also among the historians arising from defect of imagination. It is not every historian who can judge and reveal the great complex and self-contradictory minds, of which Shakespeare's Macbeth is one type, and his Henry IV. another. History is full of absurd false drawing. What is a historian to do when he comes on a personage who is at the same time magnanimous and malignant, who domineers over the weak and apologizes to those who challenge him, and yet is great and dignified? One may ask that if the historian is unable to solve the contradictions and show the character as Shakespeare can represent it, both lofty and degraded, both generous and selfish, enlightened and at the same time self-deceived, he should at least acknowledge the contradiction and state the paradox. To shrink from attacking such historical problems when they come in his way is for the historian to aid in debasing the moral currency.

Character drawing is necessary in history; it is necessary in practice, in conduct, though it need not be formal or even articulate; it is also convenient in reflection on conduct, in ethics. Aristotle in his character sketches is led far from the ways of philosophic research, in the direction of comedy; he is seen

feeling his way towards the methods of the novelist. He does not get quite as far as that; his sketches are satirical rather than dramatic, and satire is generally an inferior and an easier form, a description by enumeration, by means of collected notes. But satire and drama are pretty closely related, and no doubt the philosopher would have gone further if he had had time, and would have strengthened and defined more fully the lineaments of his exemplary characters. Mr. Raleigh in his history of the English Novel has shown how the old Aristotelian form of typical "characters," handed down from Theophrastus to the humorists of the seventeenth century, was modified into something less abstract and more imaginative; the characters came down out of their cases in the ethical museum and walked about with Sir Roger de Coverley and his friends. This, no doubt, according to Aristotelian principles, is what Aristotle and Nature really intended in the beginning, and all the host of imaginary persons in novels are really the supplement and realization of the Nicomachean Ethics. Many students of the Ethics have thought that what they really required to complete them was a knowledge of modern fiction.

There are other ways in which Imagination comes into the matter of Ethics. Wordsworth has explained them in different parts of his writings. It was not of dramatic imagination, of imagination as applied to the problems of individual character, that Wordsworth was thinking when he made Imagination into the dominant faculty by virtue of which the functions of all the other powers of mind are determined and qualified. He was thinking rather of the faculty that quickens perception, that raises the value of ordinary experience, without adding to it any fanciful or mythological decoration.

The great imaginative moralists, as it has been already remarked, show in their writings an alternation between two contrary points of view. They are at one moment high in some lofty region of contemplation among the Immensities, clean out of reach of sober rationalism: at another they are down among the meanest particulars, where respectable writers of prose are equally unable to follow them. There is Blake, for instance,

who is lost in his mystical tragedy of Space and Time till he reappears quite happily talking about Poplar and old Bow—

“The *Jew's Harp House* and the *Green Man*,
The Ponds where boys to bathe delight,
The fields of cows by Welling's farm
Shine in Jerusalem's pleasant sight.”

There is Burke, who after drawing into one view the meaning of all the centuries, will be off inventing scandalous comparisons for the liberal shepherds of the Revolution. There is Carlyle—but what need is there to illustrate by any quotation the range of Carlyle, from the silence of the Eternal Spaces down to the manners of contemporary pig-merchants on board the Irish packet? In Wordsworth there are the same extremes and he explains the relation between them better than the other moralists.

Imagination to Wordsworth is not only poetical imagination—the faculty that is bound to express itself in verse—it is also a power that is shared by the poet with his audience, much more common than the talent of the artist. It is not fiction, nor, in the ordinary sense, invention. If the instances are taken from the “Prelude” in which he describes from his own memory the way his imagination was influenced and taught, it will be found that most of the imaginative “visitings,” to use his favorite word, are capable of being represented, literally and prosaically, as extensions of ordinary experience, or, better, as the intensifying of ordinary modes of perception. In some of his early experiences, it is true, there is what looks like a beginning of mythological invention, as when the sense of something terrible in the mountains seems to turn into the shape of vast Titanic personages:—

“huge and mighty forms that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.”

But he does not usually find this kind of suggestion in what he remembers best—the sense of the desolation of upland waters on the moors—the scene where he lay watching for the ponies that were to bring him home at Christmas:

“the wind and sleety rain,
And all the business of the elements
The single sheep, and the one blasted tree
And the bleak music from that old stone wall,
The noise of wood and water, and the mist—”

These moments are not regarded by Wordsworth as inventive, but it is to these that he returns for the refreshment of his imagination. What they indicate as he reflects on them is that the mind is capable of being quickened to see more of reality than it usually sees—a fragment, here and there, of what the universe may be like in the everyday perception of higher intelligences. Hence the rest and peace of the imagination in the remembrance of these moments, because they are known to be not capricious and carnal fancies but veritable insight and attainment. There is in this sort of imagination no disabling of ordinary perception or ordinary judgment. The stone wall, the sheep, the thorn tree, remain as before good natural solid things of prose, if you choose to take them so. Only for the Imagination, as it happened, they were part of an experience in which the mind was elevated, quickened, and made to know more than it is commonly able to apprehend. The mind is not left to itself in these perceptions or imaginations; its perceptions are not isolated pictures, but part of an untraveled world to which it is from time to time admitted. It is this sense of security in Wordsworth's visionary moments, the sense of not being left to his own fantasy, but of having indefinite possibilities of revelation all about his experience, that explains the relation between his poetical treatment of common matters and the mystical theory recorded in the “Tintern Abbey” and elsewhere. It is not only that he has something of Blake's mystical confidence that all the outward creation, Blake's “vegetable world,” is equally valueless, and all capable of being transfigured, so that Islington and Marybone, the “Green Man” tavern and Welling's farm may have their places in the new Jerusalem. The weakness of this theory of Blake's is that it may be so easily imitated and degraded by anyone who chooses to make a dogma of it. Equally with its opposite, “the general good,” it may be made “the plea of the hypocrite and flatterer.” But Wordsworth's position is different from this

and does not lend itself to imitation so easily. His belief is that the imaginative moments of which he speaks, by bringing the mind beyond its usual limits, by giving it a view, here and there, of a more lively world than the ordinary, yet without refuting or confounding the ordinary world, lead first to a secure and tranquil frame of mind, and then, in that calm weather, to a sense of the life of the universe. So the mind attains its proper freedom, through imagination. And at the same time this religion is protected from the shallowness of the "false infinite," of the conventional vague optimism, by the difficulty and complexity of the process that leads to it. In the life of Wordsworth there may be many faults and fallacies, which the critics have sufficiently displayed, but his biography of the Imagination is without a flaw in its sincerity, and every step in it is an ordeal.

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ETHICS AND THE WEATHER.

THE problem of human conduct, as far as the individual is concerned, is perhaps no nearer a solution to-day than it was in the time of the Sophists. Certainly no one has been able to formulate a law from which can be predicted what A and B and C will do, under given conditions, for each is sure to react to them, in his own peculiar manner; still it is safe to say that the conditions are becoming more and more subjects of study. Yet, however hopeless may be the enigma of the conduct of the individual, that of the mass does not present quite so many difficulties. In human nature there are enough characteristics common to all, to form a working basis, and certain laws of conduct may be formulated for a people even though they lose their validity when applied to the individual. So-called "Racial Traits" are but the observed effects of such laws, and are generally based upon the influence of some condition of the environment, not infrequently the climate, upon the people. The fact that they are not true for every individual